



# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH WOMEN EMPLOYMENT: A STUDY OF HOUSEHOLD HELPERS IN DELHI REGION

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## ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is an essential precondition for elimination of poverty. Many International and National bodies have stressed on women empowerment giving attention to their participation in society, decision-making, education and health. This paper is an effort to assess the role of women in women empowerment through employment and the perception of improvement in different pre-determined domains. The sample size was restricted to 10 household helpers. This paper also talks about positive improvement in all domains after they started working than they were before. Micro finance has brought tremendous change in their lives at the grass root level, women had better access to credit facilities and increased income which helped them to contribute to the house holds expenses. Thus the participants had economic security, easy credit accessibility, better decision making in family, improved family environment (relative freedom from domination), increased mobility and improved political and legal knowledge.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Employment, Household Helpers, Delhi.

## INTRODUCTION:

Empowerment refers to the process of change that gives individuals greater freedom of choice and action. According to Pillai (1995), "empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted; nor can it be given away as aims." Power has to be acquired and once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved.<sup>1</sup>

Women Empowerment is one of the most important factor contributing to equality between women and men. Though women have a great contribution in the development process, they have low status as compared to men, specifically in the developing world.<sup>2</sup>

But recent time situation is changing day by day because they are receiving educational facilities, training facilities and other socio-economic facilities. Among different determinants of women empowerment like education, employment status, age, family status, contribution to household income etc. employment plays the vital role. The women who are involved in any income related activities or who contribute in the family income they are more empowered than the women who are not engaged in any income related activities.<sup>3</sup> The women who earn and contribute a little to the family expenditure are able to exercise their rights and power that increases their self-esteem and self-confidence.<sup>4</sup>

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Kabeer (1999) the study reveals that empowerment means the process which requires change at different levels and in different dimensions: change at the individual level and change in their 'inner' sense of self or in their access to material resources and relationships within the family and household. Women believed that their financial contribution had helped them earn greater respect from their husbands. They were also proud that they were able to better care for their children. Women's had a consideration that money as the major cause of quarrels in the homes. These get subsided or disappeared entirely once women began to earn a substantial income of their own.

Lopez-Claros et al. (2005) Empowerment also refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies.

Khan (2006) and Mason and Smith (2003), Empowerment is a process which enables women to meet both their practical and strategic needs and increases women's political power, consciousness about them and strengthens women's self confidence.

The Women's Empowerment Program in Nepal (2007) the study showed an average of 89000 out of 130000 or 68 percent of women in its program experienced an increase in their decision-making roles in the areas of family planning, children's marriage, buying and selling property and sending their daughters to school – all areas of decision-making traditionally dominated by men.

GU (2005) Women empowerment consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief and

practice.

The Centre for Self-Help Development (CSD), (1991) It is reported that women were able to make small purchases of necessary items like groceries independently. But larger purchases and personal purchases, like jewellery, always needed the consent of the husbands, representing incomplete progress towards empowerment in this area.

Hossain & Jaim (2011) and Yusuf (2010) Women empowerment means the participation of women in household decision making process and contribution to the family income.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the role of women in women empowerment through employment.
2. To study the perception of improvement in different pre-determined domains.

## Sources of Data:

The source consisted of primary and secondary data. The primary data source was the respondents. The secondary data for the study were books, journals, reports and records related to the topic.

## Population:

This study comprises of household helpers from Delhi region.

## Sample:

This study consisted of 10 household helpers from Delhi region.

## Tools & Techniques used for Data Collection:

Personal interview with the help of interview schedule was the main tool used for collecting information from the respondents. Methods like observations, focused group discussions and informal discussions were also used for eliciting data. The interview schedule was very helpful in collecting information directly from the respondents and besides it was the ideal tool since the respondents were not highly educated.

## FINDINGS:

The findings of our study were broadly categorized into eight domains. These were;

## Freedom of mobility:

It was observed that before joining work, women were depending entirely on their family members for outward activities. After joining, they perceive to have more freedom of mobility and were able to manage most of the out-door activities (taking children to school, doing daily house hold purchase etc.) without any hindrance from family members. They were able to go to hospitals, banks and even to distant places independently. As mentioned by a participant, "*Previously; my husband used to drop me whenever I had to go to any relative's house, because I didn't know how to go. Now I can manage alone*".

## Relative freedom from domination by the family:

All the group members invariably experienced a change in the attitude of their

husbands and other family members and felt relatively relaxed from domination after joining work. They said that previously, they were ill-treated, verbally abused and were even beaten by their husbands but after joining work, they were treated with respect in their families. Few women said that they could voice against any ill treatment from family on them. As said by them, "Now they (family members) are not treating us badly. We also help in the family's financial assistance as we have become part of the family income".

#### **Involvement in decision making:**

Almost all the household helpers opined that their involvement in decision making in family had been improved. Contrary to what was happening before, after they started earning, they were even consulted by their husbands before taking any decisions on matters like house hold expenses, buying TV or other items, children's education etc. Even before starting a new business, their opinion was sought for which gave them a feeling of importance and well-being. However, some women felt that they had developed independent decision making and even had the courage to take it against their family members if they felt it as good.

#### **Ability to make small and large purchases:**

Purchasing ability of the women had undoubtedly increased after joining work. Almost all the members who are earning in group were independently purchasing necessary household and personal things. As commented by a participant, "As I was jobless, had no money and felt bad when my children asked me some minor things like chocolate etc..., but now the things are completely different after working".

#### **Meeting family expenses:**

After joining work, the women were able to spend money to meet family requirements like paying house rent, children's fee, medical expenses, household items etc. They were even able to manage regular savings by deciding on priorities heads of expenses. Thus, at times of need, they could contribute to important events like marriage, education, constructing houses etc. from the savings which improved their status and respect in families. They were also getting better co-operation and support from family. As stated by a participant, "Previously my husband used to shout if I have not cooked in time, but now, he adjusts if some day, I am late due to work".

#### **Economic security:**

Many household helpers said to have opened savings accounts in bank or post office after joining work and were having regular savings. Thus, they were able to avail loan against their savings and utilized in various income generating activities like making incense sticks, retail shop, dairy, transport business etc... either in group or individually. Some have invested money in making new house or in gold as they thought that these were profitable investments for long term. They were also able to make useful expenses which were difficult for them to do before, because of financial crisis in family. As said, "I could avail education for my daughter; I spend my maximum savings for her education".

#### **Political and legal awareness:**

After joining work, the level of awareness in political, educational and legal fields had increased. They were well informed about their local leaders and some knowledge about the Nation's political affairs. They even knew the legal age of marriage for boys and girls, dates of election as well as the nominated candidates. The members felt that they were able to decide independently who to vote for and elect without any pressure from family.

#### **Improved Social status:**

All the household helpers felt that being working women had improved their status in society.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

The study tried to explore the perceptions of women regarding their empowerment in various key domains. It marked a definite positive improvement in all domains after they started working than they were before. Micro finance has brought tremendous change in their lives at the grass root level. It could be explained as follows; after joining work, women had better access to credit facilities and increased income which helped them to contribute to the house holds expanses. They were even able to successfully plan the family budget and thus there was reduction in scarcity in the family. All these collectively had improved their family relations, reduced domination or abuse or any kind of ill-treatment by family members. The women in our study too said that they could even voice against any mal-treatment against them in families. Further, Their improved positions in their families could be noted from the statement, 'previously we were addressed with disrespect but now our husbands call us with respect'. A study done in Ghana also reported that the husbands appreciated their wives' increased economic contribution to families and respected and listened to them after they joined the credit with education program more than they did before. We too noted the same in our study and the members felt that all these were because they contributed significantly to family income. As said by a house hold helper, 'previously my husband would abuse me verbally if I was little late in cooking but now, even if I would be late for related affairs, he adjusts without complaining'. Thus, it could be said that earning potential gave the women a life of respect and dignity among their family members which was lacking previously because they were unable to earn and thus had to be subjugated and suppressed in their own fami-

lies. Naila Kabeer's study of Small Enterprise Development Program (SEDP) from Bangladesh showed a direct causal link between the women making contribution to household expenses and a reduction in their abuse level in families. In India, the Working Women's Forum too found that about 40.9 % of its members experienced reduction in domestic violence because of personal empowerment, while 28.7 % were even able to stop it through group action. Centre for Self-Help Development (CSD) in Nepal also noticed that women's empowerment exerted greater resistance to physical abuse on them and their husbands' addictions like alcoholism.

Women's ability to influence others or make decisions regarding their lives is considered to be one of the principal components of empowerment, yet the type of decision and the degree of influence to be considered as their empowerment should be clarified in different contexts. Though in our study, the women had better decision-making in their families, yet the crucial decisions were taken with the consent of the entire family. Increased earnings, economic security and better decision making after joining work had improved the abilities of all the women to make small purchases of personal use and that of their households like groceries, stationeries etc. independently. As far as large purchase was concerned, the responses in our study were very few, probably representing incomplete progress towards empowerment in this area. Nirdhan Utthan Bank Ltd from Nepal reported that decisions in families which were being previously taken exclusively by the husbands themselves were taken in consultation with their wives after they started working. They also reported that women's control over family assets and income had increased after joining Nirdhan, yet they secured the husband's agreement in any investment to avoid discrepancy and to maintain harmony and unity within the household. However, M Shrestha (1998) reported that women were not able to decide and purchase large items like jewellery etc. without consulting their husbands. The Women's Empowerment Program in Nepal led to their independence in decision-making in affairs like child's education, marriage or buying assets etc.

All the participants in our study unanimously perceived freedom in their mobility after started working as they were involved in income-generating activities and were managing their routine outdoor activities independently. Some of the respondents were capable of travelling alone even to long distances which was previously unthought-of. In our study too, the members were approaching independently to banks for loan applications etc. Studies from several micro-finance and micro-enterprise support programs had observed significant improvements in women's status in their family and communities after joining those. Women's increased **economic capability** had improved their position in society by their substantial financial contribution to their families which conferred greater value to their views and gave them more entitlements in the family and in the community. Similarly, the perception of women of their position in the society in our study was very positive. All of them felt to have received more respect in family and community after joining work, particularly from the male members. Their success had paved the way to be valued and respected in society. The CSD program from Nepal and Freedom from Hunger program from Ghana also reported increased respect of their clients in the community after joining the work.

Self-confidence is one of the most crucial areas of change for empowerment, yet it is also one of the most difficult domains to assess. It is a complex concept relating to women's perception of their capabilities and their actual level of skills and capabilities. Self-esteem and self-confidence are closely linked with knowledge. It was observed in our study that continuous interaction among themselves had improved their **political and legal awareness** which ultimately gave them confidence. Capacity building and regular saving increased their earnings, improved their purchasing ability and decision making in the family. All these in turn had improved confidence of house hold helpers and thus were able to influence everyone. According to a respondent, "We are no way inferior to men. We can do anything we want". The statement actually refers to their confidence which was lacking prior to joining work.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The involvement of women in income related activities increases the level of empowerment. An empowered woman can exercise her power in her own choice in making household decision, contribution to household income, and control over resources and political or development activities. She can enjoy more benefits or rights in access to resources, control over her assets, and participation in household decision making. Present study plays an important role in empowering women by strengthening their earning ability, boosting their self-confidence and promoting regular savings. Thus the participants had economic security, easy credit accessibility, better decision making in family, improved family environment (relative freedom from domination), increased mobility and improved political and legal knowledge.

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